

Postscript to Preface



In this new volume of songs by Ivor Gurney there is nothing to alter in the Preface which ~~had~~ appeared in the two earlier volumes and which is reprinted here, but there are several things to add.

First, sincerest thanks are due to the poets, ~~and to~~ ^{and their publishers} their generous permission to use the poems which Gurney here set to music: & thereby ^{continuing} ~~helping~~ ^{so much towards the publication of this volume which} is a continuation of the memorial to him initiated in the earlier volumes.

Then I want to record the truest gratitude and thanks to Dr Herbert Howells and Mr Gerald Finzi for their invaluable help in preparing the songs for press. ~~They took a~~ ^{They} ~~the lion's share in the difficult work of making~~ ^{of making} Gurney's highly characteristic "lay-out" of his ~~manuscripts~~ ^{songs} ~~(which were dashed down onto paper)~~ readily readable without sacrificing his own personal touch ~~and~~ the look of his pages. Where any editing has been done, it has been confined, ^{as in the earlier volumes, to the minimum amount} ~~to the minimum~~ — only just enough ^{being added} in the way of phrasing and expression marks to secure the clarity of Gurney's ~~own~~ intentions.

But ~~even~~ with even the most careful and faithful

editing it ^{was often} impossible to convey ~~much~~ ^{all} of Gurney's own ways of performing his songs, and I have therefore thought some notes about these may be useful to singers and accompanists. ^{They have been written} ~~So I have written these~~ ^{because I sang} from my own recollections, ~~for~~ Gurney ~~should~~ ^{sang} very nearly his ^{new} songs to me ~~between~~ as he wrote them; ~~for many years~~ and my recollections have been ^{most kindly} checked and supplemented ~~most kindly~~ by Dr Herbert Howells, who knew Gurney even before he came to the Royal College of Music.

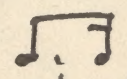
For singers and accompanists

1 The general approach to Gurney's songs then, should be the same as that ^{to} Schubert's ^{songs}, for though Gurney's work is essentially English, ~~and owes~~ ^{owing} more than a little to folk-song and the songs of Parry, ~~the~~ ^{the technical} musical foundation ^{of his technique} was that of the classical Viennese school, ^{in Gurney's songs}

~~In Gurney's songs~~ the melodic line, ~~which~~ ^{is} often long. It is most important, and ~~it~~ should carry the ^{poem} as naturally as a river carries a boat. ~~The~~ ^{Further} to say, his songs presuppose ^{beauty of} voice, and not merely diction, in the singer, though of course the diction must be ^{too and} excellent. Gurney's word-setting and his sense of ~~the~~ word-values was so perfect that ~~in general~~ singers will ~~do best to keep to~~ ^{get the best results, by keeping strictly to} his written note-values ~~and~~ ^{not to} attempting to ~~make~~ effects by pulling them

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about. Gurney himself when singing kept remarkably closely to his own written rhythms, and singers will be well advised to follow him and to realise that his word-~~and~~ cum-note values are rich in expressiveness. Gurney too always kept ~~the~~ ^{the} life of a song going from start to finish — it never sagged or got dispersed on the way. He seemed to feel the flow of the melody and rhythm of a song as practically continuous — even where there were rests or silent bars the mental tension remained unbroken. Where melismatic passages occur they should be sung very beautifully and not in the perfunctory "let us get ^{over this quickly} ~~this~~ way". Gurney never used a melisma without some special meaning in relation to the words, and his melismatic passages are in the line of descent from those of Beethoven, Wagner, and Pary.

Special attention is required for Gurney's dotted notes to make them long enough, ^{and the short notes short} ~~as in~~ enough if ^{they should be performed} as in the classical Viennese style, especially where this rhythm occurs  — that is to say with the long note a shade longer and the short one rather shorter. x

In regard to the ^{piano} accompaniments Gurney used both pedals ~~very freely~~ at the same time very freely, so that the accompaniments ^{often} were ~~often~~ a sort of wash of lovely sound as a background to the voice. This effect cannot well be written out, being very spontaneous, but it

must be remembered. Rigidity and dry tones are out ^{entirely}
 of keeping with Gurney's own playing.

Relationship of G's pianistic technique to
 his manner of performance.

Slick clarity is the last and worst failure in
 accompanying him.

Relation of colour to the central idea and
 mood was a poem: a prime law for Gurney.
 She need of an almost creative sympathy
 with the thought of a man who was
 in two senses creative — poet as well as
 composer.

[The above pencilled addition is
 in the handwriting of Herbert Howells.
 J. Littlejohn,
 Deputy Keeper,
 Parnassus Library.
 14 Nov 1978.]

